



24 November 2004



SAFETY ALERT **Soldier Chemical Abuse**

1. Bell Sends 5-05 provided information on a Soldier who had crashed his car while driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. He was killed in the crash and his passenger was paralyzed. We recently received information on another Soldier who died in October. The Soldier was found dead in his barracks room after failing to show up for work. He was lying facedown on his bed; a small amount of blood and vomit was on his pillow.
2. Although his death is still under investigation, it appears the Soldier may have died while trying to get high. Preliminary autopsy results indicate that the cause of death was poisoning from diflouroethane, which is a chemical found in aerosol cleaning sprays. A can of dust-off aerosol cleaning spray containing diflouroethane was found in the Soldier's room.
3. Aerosols are only one type of inhalant that people commonly use to get high. Others include cleaning fluid, glue, nail-polish remover, and rubber cement. Most inhalants depress the nervous system. Symptoms that often accompany their use include light-headedness, numbness, a feeling of excitement, and a temporary sensation of well-being. The alcohol-like effects also include giddiness, lack of coordination, loss of inhibition, slowed reflexes, slurred speech, and weakness. As with alcohol, inhalants often cause depression and users may not remember events or their behavior afterwards. People who use inhalants can often be identified by the odor of a solvent on their breath or clothing, which can linger for several hours.
4. Acute effects from the use of inhalants include coughing and sneezing; decreased respiratory rate; drowsiness; headache; irritated eyes, mouth, and nose; lack of concentration; nausea and vomiting; and thirst and salivation. Inhalants can be especially dangerous when a user exerts him- or herself or becomes excited after inhaling. Some of the more dangerous effects of inhalants include severe breathing difficulties and irregular heartbeat, which can result in sudden death. Aerosols can also freeze the larynx and lungs, which causes the user to suffocate.
5. Using inhalants can cause serious harm, including brain damage, chromosomal abnormalities, confusion, depression, fatigue, kidney damage, lung damage, paranoia, tremors, and weight loss. The damage caused by using inhalants is sometimes irreversible.

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6. Leaders: I ask that you increase your awareness of the signs of drug and chemical abuse, including the use of inhalants. Seek out and identify Soldiers who may be using drugs or engaging in other high-risk activities. Demonstrate your commitment to their welfare by arranging for counseling when appropriate. The USAREUR Leaders Guide to Post-Reintegration (at <http://www.per.hqusareur.army.mil/postreintegration/index.htm>) lists contact information for Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) and other counseling and prevention resources available in your community.

7. Soldiers: I ask that you reaffirm your commitment to uphold Army standards. If you observe fellow Soldiers abusing drugs or chemicals, please ensure that they get the help they need to stop—their lives may depend on it. Remember, professional Soldiers do not abuse drugs, drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or needlessly place their lives or the lives of others at risk. We must live the Warrior Ethos on and off duty.

8. Ensure that this safety alert is given the widest possible distribution by forwarding it electronically and posting it on bulletin boards. “No Loss of Life” is our goal. I want every Soldier to read this message and reaffirm his or her commitment to uphold the Army’s standards and values as we continue to execute with excellence, Any Mission, Anywhere.



B. B. BELL
General, USA
Commanding

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